The Power of Quiet: Re-*making* Affective Amateur and Professional Textiles Agencies

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Abstract: This article advocates an enlarged understanding of the benefits of manual creativity for critical thinking and affective making, which blurs the boundaries, or at least works in the spaces between or beyond amateur and professional craft practices and identities. It presents findings from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project: Co-Producing CARE: Community Asset-based Research & Enterprise (https://cocreatingcare.wordpress.com). CARE worked with community groups (composed of amateur and professional textile makers) in a variety of amateur contexts: the kitchen table, the community cafe, the library, for instance, to explore how critical creative making might serve as a means to co-produce community agency, assets and abilities. The research proposes that through 'acts of small citizenship' creative making can be powerfully, if quietly, activist (Orton Johnson 2014; Hackney 2013a). Unlike more familiar crafts activism, such 'acts' are not limited to overtly political and public manifestations of social action, but rather concern the micro-politics of the individual, the grass roots community and the social everyday. The culturally marginal, yet accessible nature of amateur crafts becomes a source of strength and potential as we explore its active, dissenting and paradoxically discontented aspects alongside more frequently articulated dimensions of acceptance, consensus and satisfaction. Informed by Richard Sennett's (2012) work on cooperation, Matt Ratto and Megan Bolar (2014) on DIY citizenship and critical making, Ranciere's (2004) theory of the 'distribution of the sensible', and theories of embodied and enacted knowledge, the authors interpret findings from selected CARE-related case studies to explicate various ways in which 'making' can make a difference by: providing a safe space for disagreement, reflection, resolution, collaboration, active listening, questioning and critical thinking, for instance, and offer quiet, tenacious and life-enhancing forms of resistance and revision to hegemonic versions of culture and subjectivity.

Keywords: activism, amateur, craft, co-creation, community, textiles.

Introduction: *Making* things happen. CAREing for *active* communities

The AHRC Connected Communities scheme, which has funded over 300 projects to date, supports research that examines the changing place of communities in our lives, their role in encouraging health, economic prosperity and creativity in the past and the future (Facer and Enright 2016). Co-Producing CARE: Community Asset-based Research & Enterprise was one of a number of projects that used practice-based arts research methods to explore community co-production (https://cocreatingcare.wordpress.com). It focused on domestic textile processes undertaken in amateur settings. Creative hobbies involve individual, family and community knowledge and modes of social engagement, they absorb people, draw them together, and can be both fulfilling and fun yet, too often, these qualities are dismissed or ignored. A central objective was to explore how they might promote collaboration to build community assets and agencies. If and how, that is, these agencies might be amplified through co-produced interventions, encouraging participants to interrogate the wider potentials of making as a social, cultural and political community resource. A partnership between stakeholder organisations Craftspace Birmingham, Voluntary Arts England, Bealtaine Festival (age and creativity) Dublin, and Falmouth and Northumbria Universities, CARE worked with knitting, crochet, sewing and embroidery, activities that are undertaken voluntarily and for pleasure. The intention was that participants would not only exchange crafts skills and knowledge through making, but might also build capacities for resilience, critical thinking, and the confidence to better operate in the world beyond the craft circle: to realise, that is, their critical agency within civil society as arts and crafts practitioners, designers, activists, volunteers, entrepreneurs, or any combination of these.

CARE, as such, set out to co-develop and test with stakeholder partners and community groups a methodology and a method (the CARE method) for community learning through co-produced, co-creative, reflexive making and sharing. Starting from the sociologist Richard

Sennett's (2012) proposal that when we make together we engage in modes of cooperation that promote trust and counteract isolation, the project worked within a broad conceptual framework of engaged and active citizenship that can arise from diverse forms of critical making (Ratto 2011a and 2011b). The project was organised in two phases: an initial pilot study of 3-4 months followed by a period of reflection and a second phase of around 10 months, which included submitting an amended proposal to funders. This structure enabled community participants to help co-produce the second phase, providing critical insight and refining or rethinking the initial proposal based on their experience. The CARE pilot, which aimed to interrogate making as a means of communication, was developed with stakeholder organisations, consultants and the advisory group. It involved community participants in Birmingham and Cornwall in a series of reciprocal 'making exchanges': a playful 'call and response' process based on the game 'consequences' or, as we termed it, 'material consequences'. This required participants to respond to one another without meeting through the exchange of 'maker stories' via hand-made and other personal items in maker boxes, and short films. The distancing process was intended to intervene in and disrupt the normative experience of making to expose the underlying social relations; to explore, for instance, how making might promote understanding through the location of common ground or result in disagreement due to what terms the different registers involved (Rancière 2004: 12).

One important learning point to emerge from the pilot was that craft, in and of itself, is not always an easy or indeed comfortable means of promoting understanding (Hackney 2013b; Hackney 2013c). A range of discontents and differing views about skill, quality, creativity and even the purpose of research emerged at the Knowledge Sharing event, which brought participants and researchers together at the end of the initial phase. We realised that while the social capital of connecting people through making might not be enough to promote cohesion in any straightforward way, it certainly served as a means for a range of voices in different registers to be heard, and to disagree. These productive tensions, as we came to understand them, informed the project's second phase: Making Together, a series of co-creational, participant-led activities that resulted in such creative craft interventions as the Embroidery Story-telling Circle and bespoke, fabricated heritage souvenirs (Hackney & Maughan 2016; Hackney & Figueiredo 2017). These activities demonstrated a range of findings about collaborative making as means of reflexive co-creation and critical making, including: how the domestic sewing circle can function as a safe space for textile professionals to interrogate their profession; how collective making can foreground then overcome difference, support critical thinking about health, and build confidence and wellbeing alongside the acquisition of new skills and abilities (http://projects.falmouth.ac.uk/craftivistgarden).

Research suggests that a participatory, co-creative approach is key to developing greater self-awareness and confidence amongst communities and individuals to take action and change their environment and life experiences (Crooke 2007: 33). The thinking is that if people become more critical of their own conditions and circumstances, albeit 'quietly' in ways that are embedded in and entangled with the rhythms and structures of daily life, they feel more willing to challenge accepted norms or practices (Hackney 2013a). Those who promote a model of DIY citizenship argue that the distributed creativity involved in "creating community gardens, filming personal music videos, and *even* knitting" [author's italics] can be understood and evaluated as emergent modes of political activity (McKay 1998; Ratto and Bolar 2014: 7). We can explore how making together builds social capital in the form of friendship networks or the confidence that comes from acquiring new skills. Critics of social capital, nevertheless, argue that it ignores the power relations embedded in 'capital', which is based on competitiveness and the possession of power and position, while networks can be exclusive and excluding, and cohesive communities can be intolerant (Crooke 2007). A robust account of power relations is required to avoid invocations of 'democracy' based on liberal assumptions of individualised agency. To this end CARE consultant and expert in

community development, Alison Gilchrist, has argued for the creation of new circuits of power and sustainable networks that promote access and inclusion and are accountable to communities (Gilchrist and Taylor 1997:165-179). Working collaboratively with community groups and partners to co-produce and co-create knowledge goes some way towards enabling participants to set the agenda and parameters of the research/project, and become involved according to their needs and on their own terms**.** The cultural theorist Zygmut Bauman (2010), meanwhile, believes that the current increased interest in the idea of community is generated by a rising sense of insecurity and threat, whereby community represents a means to reverse uncertainty because it is thought to bring protection and wellbeing. The need to be mindful of the power relations embedded in communities of practice and the wider structures in which they operate, while exploring the making group as a safe space for voicing disagreement, facing challenges and taking risks, underpinned the ethics of CARE that informed the case studies below.

Making Histories. Amateur & Professional Agencies: "a complex and contradictory form of self-reliance"

The meanings attached to amateur and professional crafts are complex, often contradictory and shift according to location and time from the restrictive to the liberatory. This section briefly charts some of those changes, mapping a context for understanding the relationship between amateur and professional crafts practices and identities, and why the amateur and amateurism, might serve as a mode and a space for critical creative agency.
Since the nineteenth century the crafts have been proposed as a remedy for social difficulties, a source of moral and psychological well-being, a form of recreation and a means to more humane working (Belfiore and Bennett 2008; Morris 1882). Hobbies historian Ken Gelber argued that, rooted in a nineteenth century ethics of employment, handicrafts were developed as a way to "integrate the isolated home with the ideology of work". He, nevertheless, also acknowledged that paradoxically they also "passively condemn the work environment by offering contrast to meaningless jobs" (Gelber 1999: 19-20). Hobby crafts remain, however, at the bottom of a hierarchy of creative leisure occupation, and continue to be denigrated, particularly in the context of women's domestic activity. Craft historian Paul Greenhalgh (1997: 37), for instance described Women's Institute handcrafts as "a rarefied form of household husbandry…a vision of craft void of the original political commitment, a vernacular ruralism with pretensions to decorative art". Consequently, as Knott (2012: 255) suggested, "scholarly treatment of the subject has consistently framed the phenomenon as supplemental and marginal". The terms 'amateur' and 'professional' in this context are, however, historically unstable. Knott (2011: 13) described how the term 'amateur' (from the Latin amare, to love), at one time applied without contempt to those activities done for their own sake, was invoked in the nineteenth century by artisans in order to devalue non-professional practice as trivial and shoddy. In a similar vein, Glenn Adamson (2013: xxiii) argued that craft's location as a "mitigating factor in modern life" in opposition to the "disruptive forces of change" is historically inaccurate and limiting and needs to be rethought if we are to understand and realise its true potential. In search of instances in which craft has been aligned with progress, he examined a cross-section of women's experience of hand-making in contexts that cut across the amateur/professional divide, from sweatshop labour to suffrage banners. His conclusion that craft emerges as "a complex and contradictory form of self-reliance" at least for women, which is "always compromised, always performed, never totally authentic" is indicative of the difficulties involved in reading craft in any straightforward way (Adamson 2013: 223-2225). In contrast, Newmeyer (2008) argued that amateur, or at least non-professional crafts have a long history of use for overtly political causes, such as the quilting bee for promoting women's suffrage or to raise money for the abolition of slavery. Contemporary 'craftivist' projects, meanwhile, draw on this and feminist re-workings of domestic crafts in the 1970s, to highlight and protest against global inequalities, interventionist foreign policy, or political indifference to the AIDS epidemic by knitting (Greer 2008; Hagedorn and Springgay 2013). The contradictions embedded in amateur making,

particularly for women, are perhaps best summarized by Rozsika Parker in her foundational book *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984) when, addressing crucial issues of power and powerlessness, she declared embroidery "subversive" because it has "provided a source of pleasure and power for women": "employed to circulate femininity in women, it also enabled them to negotiate the constraints of femininity" (Parker 1984: 11).

More recently, the Maker Movement has politicised creative making activities in new ways. Matt Ratto and Megan Bolar (2014: 7), writing about DIY citizenship, argue that critical making in the form of "creating community gardens, filming personal music videos, and *even* knitting" [author's italics] can be understood and evaluated as emergent modes of political activity. Such diverse participatory engagements, often undertaken in unexpected locales, sit at the intersection of a series of tensions between: consumerism and citizenship, experts and novices, individuals and communities, politics as defined by governments and politics as DIY grassroots, representing what they term a form of "'world making' democracy". We need to pay attention to how and when individuals and communities participate in shaping, changing and reconstructing themselves, their worlds and environments, in creative ways that challenge the status quo, and normative understanding of how things are done. As such, making constitutes a critical activity that provides the possibility to intervene in systems of authority and offers a site for reflecting on how power is constituted (Ratto 2011a & 2011b). Becoming producers as well as consumers: swapping sewing patterns, offering forms of instruction and support, on and offline crafters, hackers, artists, designers and engineers potentially challenge existing systems as they are, "making things up as they go along" (Ratto and Bolar 2014: 6). DIY citizenship, as such, is a continuum with the overtly political/interventionist at one end and, at the other, those "simply channelling creativity and a kind of poesis in everyday practice" (Ratto and Bolar 2014: 19); neither extreme is more authentic, relevant, or even perhaps more revolutionary.

In an article exploring amateur craft as "quiet activism", Hackney (2013) drew on the current re-engagement with amateurism, as well as studies of 'everyday creativity', 'serious leisure' and 'flow' (Knott 2015; Stebbins 1992; Csikszentmihalyi 1990) to explore the 'quiet' agencies of domestic crafts. She argued for the recognition of a new super-connected amateur who, freed from professional constraints and informed by a wealth of on and offline resources such as citizen journalism, community broadband, online forums, social media can engage in quietly activist processes that open up new channels of value and exchange. The quiet activism practised by amateurs, and professionals in an amateur context, is not an outspoken form of radicalism or critique, but rather a means of thinking and acting independently, staking a place in the world and making 'other' voices heard (Walker 2007). From this point of view, creative making outside a professional context, through what it can enable and what it can express, is paradigmatic of the type of critical practice that can "make visible that which is not perceivable, that which, under the optics of a given perceptive field, did not possess a raison d'être, that which did not have a name" (Panagia and Rancière 2000: 124-25).

Jacques Rancière (2004: 39-40) talks of the "distribution of the sensible" to describe how hegemonic and consensual practices chop up the world, forcibly constituting categories such as the knowledgeable versus the ignorant, and those who count versus those who don't. These dividing lines themselves provoke "lines of fracture and disincorporation" resulting in "uncertain communities" and "enunciative collectives that call into question the distribution of roles, territories and languages". Rancière's (2004: 12) concern is with the "unheard": those who have no part and are without a so-called political voice in democracies. Rather he sees politics as the dynamic events and exchanges in which the 'voiceless' express and make

heard, or ‘sensible’, what has been repressed or censored within political regimes. Moments of interruption, intervention or disagreement signify the importance of radically different registers in which citizens make sense of their world, and of power and authority; different registers that, nevertheless, cannot always be rectified for the sake of consensus and agreement. Making as a mode of intervention, therefore, is political not consistently in the macro sense of activism and organized dissent, but in the micro-emancipatory sense of fostering autonomy and inventive *bricolage* using the building materials of everyday life, identity and subjectivity. Such a perspective avoids the limits of a conventional, antagonistic view of resistance bound to overt behaviors and instead permits “a generative and multidirectional theorizing of the micro-politics of resistance, focusing on how individuals exploit the looseness around meanings in a constant and simultaneous process of resistance, reproduction and reinscription” (Thomas and Davies, 2005: 699); a process akin to the repetitive rhythms and cycles materialized in the sewing circle and the craft group.

To conclude, the amateur/professional distinction increasingly unravels in a contemporary crafts economy where members of the ‘creative precariat’, including those who consider themselves amateur and/or professional craft/designer makers, may carry out their trained practice for love rather than money, or harness it to social or community ends. Reciprocally, untrained or self-educated crafters who make for fun are increasingly able to exhibit or sell their wares through internet forums, blogs and marketplaces (Levine and Heimerl 2008). New conceptions of DIY practices, meanwhile, create a “manoeuvring” space that encourages us to “rethink binary distinctions such as cultural/political and amateur/professional” and rather understand these “boundary-blurring practices” as constitutive of DIY citizenship (Ratto and Bolar 2014: 18). As Milling and McCabe (2014: 5) note, “amateur participation in creative cultural and artistic activity is the facilitating precursor to the acquisition of aesthetic knowledge, skills and activity out of which all professional practice emerges and to which it must relate”. This blurriness is exemplified by the range of participants and practices in the following case studies. The crafts economy is perhaps better described using a “diverse economies” model (Gibson Graham 2008) that takes account of the ubiquity and significance of alternative transactions involving, for example, gifting, barter, recycling and social enterprise, in which monetary exchange is no longer the sole marker of economic value, social significance or professionalism. This reorientation allows a more nuanced appreciation of how crafts knowledges and practices are distributed across, disseminated between and utilized through communities. Before considering the project case studies, which explore a range of different ways in which creative interventions can promote critical making in a largely amateur community context, it is helpful to consider the CARE project and its methodology in more detail.

Making Meaning. From Making Dialogues to Making Things Together: emergent methodologies and methods

In *Together, the Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (2012) Richard Sennett explored the social benefits of the creative process as a mode of social cooperation. With its technological obsessions and restrictive work practices, modern society he argued, isolates people, breeds anxiety and de-skills. The challenge is to forge new forms of meaningful collaboration; a process fraught with difficulty but which, if achieved, could help communities build dialogue and gain fresh insights. 'Large cohort studies on leisure activities and health demonstrate a correlation between active participation and psychological and physical wellbeing (Pressman et al. 2009). While Matthew Crawford, in *The Case for Working with Your Hands* (2009: 64), calls for **‘**a new anthropology... one that is adequate to our experience of agency” and which “gives credit to the practice of building things, fixing things, and routinely tending to things, as an element of human flourishing”. Paying attention to the quietly activist processes involved in everyday creative making precipitates a reassessment

of craft: its genres, institutions, practitioners, networks, protocols, practices and the methodologies we use to analyse and understand and them. Recent studies of textile processes employ a range of methodological approaches that draw on: anthropology (Harriman 2007), ethnography (Shercliff 2015; Desmarais 2016), auto-ethnography (Kouhia 2015), linguistics and narrative theory (Gilchrist et al 2015), co-production, co-creation and co-design (Loveday-Edwards and Maughan 2014; Sanders and Stappers 2008), as well as crafts theory (Ravetz, Kettle and Felcey 2013). The case study projects discussed here draw on these approaches and employ elements of auto and collective ethnography, unstructured participant interviews, arts methods, video and photographic documentation to capture the experiential qualities of knowledge production through stitch.

CARE's central objective was to interrogate the value of making as a means and, informed by cognisant theory, a methodology for community co-production through co-creation. We did this through participatory, arts-based action-research. The 'making dialogues' that constituted phase ones emerged from stakeholder discussion and the idea that 'seeing oneself through another's eyes' might unlock unrecognised potential. They aimed to explore co-creative making as a mode of communication and involved participants in Cornwall and Birmingham who paired up into intergenerational 'buddy' teams. All participants were women and each team consisted of one who was over and one under 50 years of age; their backgrounds varied and included textile students, members of an embroidery group, a trained painter who crafted for pleasure and someone who ran a sewing business. Each team undertook two iterations: one 'call' and one 'response' and then came together to discuss the experience. More information about the process, including the accompanying films can be found on the CARE project website ((https://cocreatingcare.wordpress.com). At the end of the pilot participants joined the project team, advisors and partners for a Knowledge Sharing event; group discussions were recorded and key points shared on whiteboards. Responses ranged from a younger student's enjoyment of the creative freedom that the project offered: how she was intrigued by the box with its mysterious contents and the filmed 'personal story', to frustration about time-scales, lack of contact and lack of direction. Pippa, the participant who ran her own sewing business, felt that it made her think more about process, while a number of participants observed that it made them "look at themselves from the outside". One reflected that although she had initially thought that the project was about supplementing skills, she gradually understood that the learning was "more fundamental" than that, operating on the level of the social and the community. Jane, who in her youth had trained as a sculptor but now worked with thread in an amateur capacity as part of an embroidery group, described an "epiphany" in her embroidery when she began to work on a larger scale and in a more sculptural manner (Hackney 2013c).

Far from bringing people closer together and promoting cooperation - although this did happen in some instances notably with participants who weren't aligned to a specific craft group or set of shared practices - differences of opinion about what constituted quality, textile skill and aesthetics soon emerged. This was particularly evident in the interactions between the younger textiles students and their tutor, and the older members of an embroidery group. The embroidery group understood their role in the exchange as one of passing on traditional skills, and were disappointed in the younger women's responses. Barbara, who makes beautiful hand-made lace, for instance, disliked her buddy Hannah's use of digital embroidery, feeling that it undermined the ethos of lace; she referred to "digital cheating". The younger women, whose responses included a short film shot on a mobile phone and a variety of stitched sketches and collaged pieces, meanwhile, felt hurt that their creative and innovative ideas had been dismissed (Hackney 2013b). The project brief that was circulated to participants had encouraged them to be true to their own craft and aesthetic vision. As it turned out, this was also interpreted in terms of differing ideas about learning and teaching. The embroidery group understood their role in the project as one of passing on knowledge, something that they were eager to do. It is little wonder, therefore, that they were frustrated by working at a distance from the younger women, and that the

latter's free interpretation of stitching did not conform to established standards. The younger students, in contrast, found the creative freedom of the project liberatory in comparison to following professional briefs. Both groups, in fact, brought their own sets of references, expectations, assumptions and desires to the project, which were deeply felt. It was a difficult time and an important, if steep, learning curve for the research team. Despite support many decided to withdraw from the project's second phase. Their experience and input, however, was instructive and formed the basis of the subsequent research proposal which, in brief, included: groups working together and over a longer period of time; more agenda setting by participants with control over how interchanges would be structured and what they would involve.

Connecting through making is clearly complex and doesn't offer any easy remedies for community cohesion. In their disagreements participants exemplified Rancière's (2004: 12) notion of radically different registers that cannot always be rectified for the sake of consensus and agreement. As such, participants were clearly making themselves heard, or in Rancière's terms "sensible", and the exchanges were nothing if not dynamic. As many observed, their experience might have changed with more time and further iterations; one participant noted that the "influences resounded later". Reflecting on the outcomes, the team increasingly began to view these tensions as productive, albeit painfully learnt, and as Gilchrist noted, indicative of where the learning was taking place. They provided insight into the workings and power relations within groups, the almost tribal strength of craft group identities (amateur and professional), and how informal networks can sometimes function not only as a collective resource but also to prevent the community acquiring new insights or learning from experiences that challenge established norms. Drawing on complexity theory, project consultant Alison Gilchrist (2000: 264-75) has argued for a model of the "well-connected community" as an integrated and evolving system of networks, comprising diverse and dynamic connections, which "tolerates difference, celebrates diversity, promotes equality and acknowledges mutuality". According to Gilchrist the well-connected community does not evolve smoothly and without challenge, rather she describes as an intermediate 'edge of chaos' zone between rigidity and randomness in which forms of 'untidy creativity' operate (Gilchrist 2000 and 2009).This analysis seems to characterise our two warring groups: the older embroiderers with their relatively rigid ideas about tradition, quality and value, and the younger students with their relatively more random 'art school' approach to creative experimentation and self-expression. 'Edge of chaos', 'untidy creativity', moreover, recalls the 'boundary-blurring' practices and 'manoeuvring space' of DIY citizenship. While Sennett's (2012: 336) reference to a "fraught, ambiguous zone of experience where skill and competence encounter resistance and intractable difference" as a metaphor for the struggles of collaboration, additionally seems to speak to our participants' experience. For Sennett, the trick is to respond to others on their own terms; a skill that involves the ability to listen well, behave tactfully, find points of agreement, manage disagreement, avoid frustration, and achieve interactions that are "knitted together" though exchanges of difference: dialogic cooperation, or the location of common ground: dialectic cooperation or, most often, a combination of the two. Although painful to experience, the 'edge of chaos' zone of 'untidy creativity' that arose in the CARE pilot was perhaps one step along the road in an emergent well-connected community of 'sensible', critical makers (Hackney 2013c).

These notions of an 'integrated and evolving system of networks', a 'fraught ambiguous zone of experience', 'untidy creativity', the forging of a boundary-blurring 'manoeuvring space', and dialectic and dialogic modes of cooperation, became central underpinning ideas in our analysis of the pilot outcomes. Following the participants' observations, the team decided to work with a series of place-located craft groups who would devise 'creative interventions', which derived from their own interests and needs, to promote reflection through learning and sharing by making in a 'critical' way. The emphasis would be on process and experience rather than products made (although making things remained integral) and reflections were to be captured and shared between all groups via a series of short films on the project website. To aid continuity across groups who were located in Falmouth, Cornwall,

Birmingham and Dublin, the research team and partners collaboratively developed two questions: What have I learnt? What have I shared? These were designed to help participants both look inwards, at their subjective experience and inner mental life, and outwards at their experience of working with others (Reynolds 2010; Shercliff 2015). With hindsight, we should have included a third question: How have I changed? Although some of this material was picked up in unstructured individual and group interviews at the end of the project (Hackney and Maughan 2016; Hackney and Figueiredo 2017).

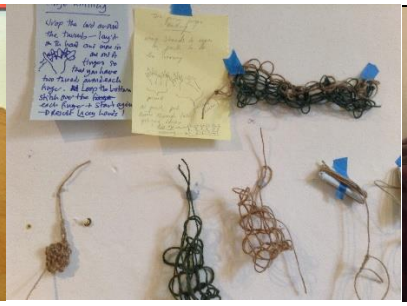
Interrogating the process of collaborative making as a means of critical thinking through knowledge exchange, 'Making Things Together' as phase two was called, drew more explicitly on Paolo Freire's (1972/1996) understanding of pedagogy as praxis, whereby learning is transformed through a process of reciprocal dialogue in which people assert their voice and question dominant assumptions. Ratto and Bolar (2014: 2 & 4) have argued that critical making "signals the integration/simultaneity of processes and practices, the act of *making 'things'*". They suggest that "critical making invites reflection on the relationship of the maker to the thing produced" and, as such, heightens critical sensibility and deepens awareness of the mediated and direct experience of interactions with the material world. The following case study workshops explored different approaches to critical making praxis. They derive from a group located in the café at the Poly arts centre, Falmouth, whose membership comprised a combination of trained arts and crafts professionals and amateur makers and who met once a month for six months or so. Participants took it in turn to devise and lead thematic workshops, each of which involved learning a particular craft skill while discussing wider social issues such as health, sustainability, technology or family. These topics at times emerged naturally from the process of making together, and at others were explicitly designed into the activities, such as Sue Bamford's 'Bunny Love Workshop', which explored the politics and practice of recycling in a playful way. To kick off proceedings 'Making by Instruction' was facilitated by Shane Waltener, an artist who works with participatory, collaborative engagement projects that involve textiles, weaving, music, dance, food and performance (http://www.shanewaltener.com). Waltener's workshop demonstrated how creative disruption might serve as a means to promote reflection and critical thinking by making the familiar strange in sometimes surprising ways; a strategy that others were to follow.

Case study 1: Making by Instruction: Embodied Instruction through Shared Making:

Drawing on studies of tacit knowledge (Pye 1968; Sennett 2008), Waltener's workshop explored how spaces of innovation and creativity can open up when we intervene in conventional modes of instruction. Working in pairs, one person was asked to physically demonstrate a craft technique to their partner without the aid of text or diagrams; the image of finger knitting (figure 1) is an example. Once this was mastered, the recipient wrote down instructions for the process (using text and image) and passed these to a second couple to interpret without benefit of the original demonstration (figure 2). This process of networked activities and interrupted instruction seemed to open space for Gilchrist's 'untidy creativity', chance and innovation. The second pair in this example, for instance, unconsciously innovated by taking the finger knitting process one step further and literally knitting themselves together and, in the process, creating a highly appropriate material metaphor for collective making (figure 3).

Megan Watkins (2010), in her study of pedagogy and accumulative affect, defined pedagogy as a "process, whereby a sense of self is formed through engagement with the world and others and the affects this generates": a process that involves "mutual recognition realized as affective transactions that at one and the same time can cultivate the desire to learn and the desire to teach". According to Watkins, affect as a bodily phenomenon, which involves "the corporeal instantiation of recognition" through mutuality and feeling "fostering a sense of self-worth" (Watkins 2010: 273), is at the heart of the teaching and learning interactions involved in any community group. This is particularly true of a sewing or knitting group where the closeness, physical and otherwise, coupled with the physicality of making, fosters a

heightened sense of bodily connection and being. Dinah Eastop (2014: 221), writing about the folk art of string figure making – an activity that has much in common with finger knitting - argued for its use in understanding "making as a process of embodiment and enacted knowledge" through the interaction between person and product, the process of making, and of demonstrating and accruing such knowledge. Embodiment, refers to the sense of knowledge stored within the body and the understanding that thinking and doing – or thinking through doing – is "indissolubly connected through the current of practical action" (Yarrow and Jones 2014: 259). Eastop, additionally, observed that the maker's body forms elements of the image, story and idea communicated in string figure making; the body, that is, is integral not only to the making process but also to what is made: the product and its meaning. Waltener's workshop deconstructed learning through making, showing how when familiar modes of doing things are interrupted, altered, or become strange, 'untidy' spaces open up and unexpected things can happen. It also foregrounded the affective aspects of learning through making: how embodied knowledge is enacted when, as the finger knitters confirmed, bodies become intimately bound up with things (figure 3).


Figs. 1, 2, 3. Details of pieces created in the Making by Instruction workshop. Photographed by the author. © Fiona Hackney.

Case Study 2: Up Close & Personal: Learning & Teaching with I-cord Knitting

I-cord knitting, which involves making cords, like string figure making has a long history yet might easily be dismissed as ephemeral and unimportant. Craft artist Christiane Berghoff (https://onestitchattime.wordpress.com) chose it for her workshop because it is relatively easy to master and involves simple, satisfyingly repetitive movements; an ideal exercise for reflecting on experiential making. She selected three ways of cord-making with: knitting needles, crochet hooks and the lucette (a wooden fork shaped tool with two prongs). All group members learnt one technique by demonstration before skill-swapping and teaching it to others. Workshop photographs (figure 4) demonstrate moments of absorbed independent working, and light-hearted social exchange suggestive of "dialogic play" or a "dance of interaction" (Watkins 2010: 277; Benjamin 1988: 27). The project film records participants' reflections as they comment on the mindful, relaxed and playful aspects of the process. One participant, who described herself as an "explorer and a discoverer and a maker", reflects on being

> …completely immersed in the experience, so I'm just doing and I'm not thinking about anything else at all, and I'm letting my hands do it. It makes me feel better, as though I'm put back in the right place…I feel satisfied and fulfilled and as though I really have been through a process and come out the other end. So I have experienced some kind of new happening there, in between the learning and the making and the doing. (https://vimeo.com/99312804)

This description of immersion is a striking demonstration of the embodied nature of processual, enacted knowledge; the way in which self, doing, making, material culture and cognition, are completely interconnected and entwined. The evocation of taking a journey through process in which new things happen in a space "between the learning and the

making and the doing", moreover, recall the chance spaces of invention in Waltener's workshop and Gilchrist's 'untidy creativity'.

In the film Berghoff emphasises the soothing, meditative qualities of such easy, repetitive activities and underscores crafting's potential to modify behaviour beyond the workshop, by helping us establish "a new [more sustainable] relationship with our things". Before leaving this workshop it is worth noting two observations that emerged when we ran it for academic participants during the AHRC Connected Communities Festival, Cardiff in 2014. Firstly, it became evident that teaching such craft techniques by demonstration necessitates a physical closeness that to some extent transgresses established norms by creating a new type of private, almost intimate, social interaction within a public space. And secondly, not everyone is soothed by such activities. Some male academics, in particular, who had no prior experience of domestic crafts, found the exercise challenging, almost threatening - one refused point blank to crochet. Misgivings, nonetheless, that for those who took the plunge were soon allayed after achieving even a small degree of success.

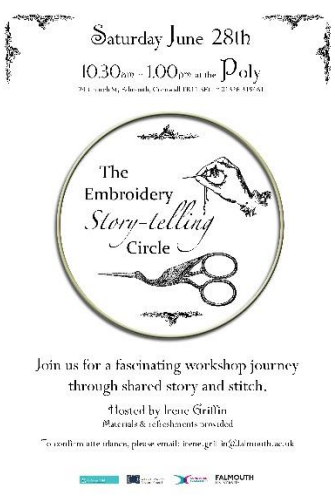


Fig. 4. Participants making at the I-cord Workshop. Fig. 5. Flyer for The Embroidery Story-telling Circle. Fig. 6. Detail of the embroidered tablecloth made in The Embroidery Story-telling Circle workshop. Photographed by the author. © Fiona Hackney.

Case Study 3: The Embroidery Story-Telling Circle: Transitional & Boundary Objects, Dialogic & Dialectic Exchanges

CARE proposed that the craft group: its processes of coming together through making and talking and the artefacts produced, is not only a metaphor for collaboration, but can also forge processes of cooperation. The Embroidery Story-telling Circle, a workshop facilitated by embroiderer Irene Griffin, set out to examine this process (figure 5). The workshop, which involved participants sitting around a circular cloth, telling stories and stitching with one selected stitch and color as the cloth was intermittently turned, was a crafty intervention designed to explore how the act of storytelling (narrative) and making (processual) might illuminate how we work together and the different ways in which identities are performed. Sennett's concept of dialogic (exchanges of difference) and dialectic (the location of common ground) cooperation informed our thinking, alongside ideas about the recognition of self through a process of affective differentiation, interaction and intersubjective engagement (Watkins 2010). The latter was based on the belief that subjectivity emerges through a series of interchanges mediated by "transitional objects" and the notion of the "boundary object", which is "at once material and processual", signifying a shared space where narratives can be situated, constructed, mediated and remediated through time (Winnicott 1965: 39; Gilchrist et al 2012: 465-467).These ideas helped us conceptualize the embroidery group in terms of 1) the value of mutual recognition through affective transactions: group reciprocity,

sociality, interaction, 2) how these are mediated through ‘transitional objects’: sewn items and associated equipment that help 3) materialize recognition of self and other through an ongoing, iterative process of making, sharing, talking, and reflective mediation and remediation.

Tensions emerged as some participants struggled to conform to the exercise, protesting about the limited colors and the requirement to work on a collective rather than an individual piece (figure 6). As with the pilot project it was the members of an established sewing group who struggled most. Issues of taste, quality and authorship were raised which, in turn, shaped the stories participants told about their ‘lives in stitch’. Others used strategies such as gentle humor, or careful listening to lighten the mood, pay attention and calm the situation. The energy ebbed and flowed as the group alternatively ‘storied’, conversed, sewed and reflected; a rhythm established by the repetitive cycle of stitching and moving on. Sennett argued that the trick to cooperation is to respond to others on their own terms, something that involves the ability to listen well, behave tactfully, find points of agreement, manage disagreement and avoid frustration. Such skills were variously conspicuous by their absence and appearance as the workshop wore on, establishing its own rhythm. Dissonance was gradually replaced by a quieter sense of cooperation as participants settled in and seemingly sewed their differences into the cloth. The sewing circle appeared to provide a safe space in which identities were expressed through stories and stitch preference, and differences that were materialized in, and mediated through, the process of collective stitching. The Embroidery Story-Telling Circle was a process and an artefact: a transitional and a boundary object, as differences were expressed dialogically through exchanges of difference, then resolved dialectically through a process of making, sharing, reflecting, mediation and remediation, which iteratively established common ground as cooperation replaced contestation, less through conversation than the quiet act of making.

Case Study 4: *Live* Archive. Re-making Sewing Heritage in Higher Education: the Hazel Sims Archive

This case study developed from Senior Lecturer in Textile Design Hannah Maughan’s work on the CARE project. Her aim was to extend her research with textile graduates, which explored how making in in an amateur setting - the domestic sewing circle – might serve as a mode of critical, reflexive making to her teaching with undergraduate textiles students (Hackney and Maughan 2016). Students worked in the university library, rather than the kitchen, but they worked directly with ‘amateur’ sources in the form of local embroiderer Hazel Sim’s archive of books and materials. As such, it also explores how contact with archival resources can not only engage students with the histories of embroidery, but also act as a cross-disciplinary research tool for what textile researchers Jo Morrison and Ann Marr (2013: 5) term “socio-responsive textile design research practice”. Textile research, that is, that directly engages students with, and potentially impacts on, the world outside the university. A heritage project that makes people more aware of the history of their local community, moreover, can become a spring board for transformative action (Crooke, 2007). Run through with emotion and personal stories, this case study set out to explore how community heritage as a “living” feature of contemporary heritage practice might provide a useful resource for those wishing to explore external engagement (Waterton and Watson 2011: 6).

Many inspiring textile archives and collections exist in the UK that are variously available and accessible to students (Kettle and McKeating 2012). Higher education institutions such as London University have long established and remarkable teaching collections. Newer universities, however, are less well-endowed and the opportunity to access local gifts for the purpose of learning and teaching is of great value for students and staff. The Hazel Sims archive is one such collection. Held within the Falmouth and Exeter Universities’ shared archival resources on the Penryn campus, Cornwall, it comprises over forty embroidery and

design books dating from the 1930s and donated by Sims' family in 2014. Conducting her own research into Sims' 'life in stitch', Maughan developed an Archive Day to embed research about cooperative making in place into her teaching practice. She was also aware that students are growing increasingly reliant on screen-based tools, disconnecting from primary research and the physical world, and wished to find ways to address this.

Sims was a professional nurse and a lifelong committed, and skilled, amateur embroiderer who was a member of the Embroiderers' Guild for over fifty years (figure 7). Having lived most of her life in London, in 1987 Sims, who was then in her sixties, moved to St. Mawes village a short distance from Falmouth, and remained there for the rest of her life. The books span seventy years and cover a wealth of techniques and learning styles (figure 9). Sims personalised them, covering them in fabric and paper, filling them with working notations, bookmarking pages, and leaving traces of her personal and stitching life through a range of everyday ephemera such as: thread packaging, sweet wrappers, clippings from exhibitions, letters from well-known embroiderers, small textile samples and personal photographs. Maughan, in collaboration with a group of undergraduate Textiles students, decided to turn textile detective and use these traces to discover, stitch and piece together, Hazel's life. Maughan positioned herself as "tutor-facilitator", working co-creatively with her students; a role that textile research-practitioner Amy Twigger-Holroyd (2017) extrapolates for designers as a new way of thinking about their practice when working with community groups.

Figs. 7. Photograph of Hazel Sims. Fig. 8 Textile students work from the Sims Collection of embroidery books. Fig. 9. Sims library of hand-covered embroidery books. The Hazel Sims archive Falmouth University. Photographed by Hannah Maughan. © Hannah Maughan.

Thirteen second year mixed media students spent a day with the Sims Collection. The day was structured into two parts and took place in the Flexible Learning Space room located in the library, which provided space to sew and read. After a general introduction about project aims, the Senior Archivist Sarah Jane outlined protocols for access and handling materials. Maughan introduced Sims and the work done with textile graduates who participated in CARE. Students then undertook object-based research (figure 8), discovering Hazel through her books and their contents. A doctor's prescription, a shopping list and a carefully concealed love letter from her fiancée dated 1945, were among the clues to her life that they discovered tucked into the pages of Sims' embroidery books. A quiet industrious hum descended on the room, broken only by excited exclamations as students began to share their findings and insights. Working with the materials they worked out: her maiden name, dates, the location of her homes, her friendship connections, interests, habits and preferences. The students were encouraged to make notes and sketches to record their thoughts, capture findings and whatever interested them. The process represented a very personal engagement with history and materials were handled with sensitivity, respect and care as students discovered Sims's life through the material fabric of her library.

The afternoon session changed pace and direction. Everyone sat around tables in the communal space and used the books and their research as inspiration to produce their own embroidered samplers. Access protocols can make it difficult to work directly from archive material. Working with embroidery, however, is an advantage as needle, thread and fabric are dry and non-blemishing materials. Although the students worked independently, the emphasis was on making together and collective agency. One challenge was to actively engage with an alternative method of learning stitch which, up until this point, had been delivered in formal workshops by the senior technician. A more personalised and self-directed learning style emerged as students selected stitches, navigating and interpreting instructions in a pictorial and written language that was often new to them due to the age of the books. Stitch selection was varied as students tested techniques that appealed. The combination of distance, due to the unfamiliarity of the material, and closeness that arose from the proximity of engagement opened a space for acquiring knowledge through an embodied process of making and critical reflection (Hackney and Maughan 2016). Making encourages conversation and students talked as they made sense of their task, or in Rancière's terms made it 'sensible'. Some spoke out loud to themselves as they 'stitch talked' the process, while others were quietly absorbed, internalising the instructions. Topics ranged from learning to drive to holiday plans, and memories about first becoming interested in stitch; these "small stories of making" became integral to the students' learning experience (Hackney and Maughan 2016). Several paired up, sharing the work of interpretation, and learning by doing: physically demonstrating what they had figured out, in much the same way as the participants in Walterner's workshop. Although a break was suggested no one took it up, being absorbed in their stitching and chat, signalling a learning environment that recalls Megan Watkins (2010: 273) notion of affective transactions. Most managed the task working with peers with only one asking her tutor for help.

At the end of the day, students completed a short questionnaire to reflect on the benefits, impact, future possibilities, and any shortcomings of working in this way. Collating the responses, it was evident that all were keen to use the archives again, and felt more confident about accessing them as a practical research and creative stimuli; "It changed my way of thinking about research", one student observed. Other benefits included a heightened sense of connection with history and awareness of its value, including the wealth of technical information available in Sims's library and interest in the social context in which her embroidery was made. Students were fascinated by Sims's story and discovering her 'hidden history' for themselves added poignancy and emotional engagement to the work. Exploring her 'life in stitch' and how her personality translated into, and could be discovered through, her work stimulated learning as they became aware of the "real emotional attachment between books, the owner and the reader", as one student put it. "I thought it was amazing! I love just looking at someone's history through books, [discovering a] sense of how they lived", another observed, while a third reflected, "It's inspired me to want to look deeper into a subject matter and look more thoroughly into context". The process of making, moreover, embedded students experientially in a unique, local aspect of embroidery history, a process summed up by the comment, "It felt that we were all part of history while it was being made".

Acknowledging renewed awareness of the value of such primary material as a rich source of technical information, embroidery tradition, autobiography and local history, students also articulated their appreciation of the increased sense of community and freedom that underpinned the day. They valued working cooperatively together as a peer group, in a different environment and in a more social, trusting and informal way: "Being in a group, working and chatting, whilst also experimenting and discovering new techniques"; "It's been a nice change to have a full day out of our normal environment and with Hannah". Working co-creatively with their tutor as an active participant in research, both as a facilitator and a maker, made students' view the learning and teaching relationship in a different light, and engendered new respect for Maughan's creative practice. Students and staff became equal partners learning through making, sharing and talking, and connected by their common

purpose to discover more about Sims through her embroidery. Drawing on historical stitch and the work of an amateur embroiderer in the context of 'archive as sewing group', the workshops crossed boundaries between: historical and contemporary practice, reading and making, the amateur and the professional, the archive and the studio, the teacher and the student. Something of the histories, processes, personalities and frameworks of amateur practice, as such, enabled professionals-in-training to review their practice in an embodied, everyday and quietly subversive way. Subsequently, students have taken this experience forward by working on an archive specific studio project, employing archival material in dissertation research, and improving their technical knowledge and skill set by engaging with more complex stitches in their studio practice.

Conclusion: *Making* Things Social. Reflexive Interventions & Amateur Agencies

CARE set out to explore how creative making, for amateurs and professionals located in an amateur setting (at the kitchen table, in a café or a library), might serve as a means to co-produce community knowledge about, for instance, existing assets, aptitudes, skills and abilities and how these might be enhanced and applied more widely in the community in activism, education, volunteering or business. Along the way, it got involved in issues of cooperation and agency, and how co-creating 'crafty' interventions might help us make reflexively, critically, purposefully and collaboratively to 'make things happen', even in the smallest of ways. The examples above demonstrate the potential power of conventionally marginalized amateur practices such as sewing and knitting to help us remake our social relations, rethink who we are and our capacities, constituting a symbol of the tenacity and craftiness of the small in the face of the powerful. Some have argued that the crafts are intrinsically radical. Bratich and Brush (2011: 237), for instance, assert that knitting in public performs a *détournement* (Debord and Wolman 1956) or subversion in which the intimate and hidden labor and productivity of domestic lives is emphatically exposed to public view. Others critique the idea that such activities have any intrinsic moral or transformative dimension (Adamson, 2010: 135-38). During the project's pilot phase researchers learnt the hard way that craft, in and of itself, is not necessarily an easy or indeed comfortable means of promoting collaboration or shared agency, and that an almost tribal loyalty to established norms of practice can be deeply felt. In Making Things Together, when the project was driven more explicitly by participants, it focused on the 'untidy', 'boundary blurring' spaces that can open up between, for instance, amateur and professional 'worlds' of practice, or when creative interventions make the familiar strange. Making's potential as a means of enacting embodied knowledge, a safe space for exploring difference, self-recognition and affectual learning, and for enabling dissonant voices to be heard, all emerged in the case studies. They are examples of the quietly activist capacities of critical making as a micro-politics of resistance embodied in everyday, collective (and individual) creativity.

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